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ABSTRACT

Research evaluated the effectiveness of varying televis on (TV) lesson formats. Adults ranging in age from 17 to 58 viewed lessons in accounting and psychology in four formats featuring: 1) a storyline running through a lesson; 2) a news magazine format dealing with different concepts in one lesson; 3) a non-authoritarian narrator; and 4) an authoritarian narrator. Results from achievement tests, interest ratings and student interviews revealed the following: 1) attitude outcomes were more influenced by TV format than were learning outcomes; 2) older adults showed a greater preference for authority figures; 3) the more interesting the course content was to the learner, the more he preferred a straight-forward presentation; 4) all learners preferred realism, positive themes, documentary approaches and identification of instructional goals; 5) subjects often learned more than they expected and were surprised at how enjoyable the process was; and 6) younger learners were more responsive than older students to subtle instructional formats, but there was some overlap. It was concluded that adults do learn from innovative TV formats, that such formats do have holding power, and that individual formats have varying appeal to different groups. (Author/LB)

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Evaluation of a Variety of Television Lesson Formats for Potential Adult Learners in an Open University System

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An Abstract

Purpose

A major new thrust in higher education today is to make college credit more accessible to people wherever they may live or work. Accessibility implies more than open admissions and more residence halls; it means reaching students where they are at physically and educationally.

The State University of Nebraska (S-U-N) is designed to be a multi-media off-campus approach to college education, similar to England's Open University. S-U-N will utilize a variety of media and means to provide college credit courses for adults. Lesson materials include newspaper articles, broadcast television, audio cassettes, and textual materials. Instructional formats are designed to be appealing, as well as instructional. It is hoped that the materials, particularly the broadcast TV lessons, will attract and maintain the interest of adult learners.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relative appeal and effectiveness of several television lesson formats with adult audiences. The typical TV lessons have essentially been televised versions of lectures with the blackboard and chalk. They have been what is sometimes called televised instruction, rather than instructional television. More recently, documentaries and several educational series have employed highly illustrated lecture formats for instructional purposes. It was not until the advent of programs like Sesame Street and Electric Company that television made significant inroads in accomplishing educational objectives with lesson formats that were entertaining and fun, as well as instructional. The purpose of this study was to determine whether similar formats (story-lines, news formats, etc.) could be employed with equal success for college level courses for adults.

Methodology

Subjects included 154 individuals ranging in ages from 17 to 58. They included volunteers and subjects who had expressed an interest in actually taking a college course through an open learning system.

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The subjects viewed video lesson segments in two college course areas, Accounting and Psychology. They were asked for their reactions to segments of the lesson and to the total television lesson. All subjects were debriefed in small groups by trained interviewers. The audience panels were asked to respond to the television segments in terms of the television's appeal, its comprehensibility, its memorability, its helpfulness in learning, and to offer suggestions for improvement.

Four major television formats were employed. They included: 1) a story-line which ran through an entire lesson, 2) a news-magazine format which dealt with different concepts in each segment, 3) a narrator on screen who was a sharer of information, and 4) an authority narrator in a highly illustrated, but non-lecture style.

Mean performance on achievement tests were compared, as were ratings of usefulness and interest level. Responses made during the in-depth interviews also served as valuable evaluation data.

Results

On the basis of the data and the in-depth interviews a number of conclusions were drawn about television formats which appeared to be both appealing and effective with adult learners. The major findings are:

1) Learning outcomes were not influenced by the differing TV formats as much as were attitude outcomes.

2) Older adults preferred some form of on-camera authority figures more than did younger adults.

3) When the course content was intrinsically interesting to the learner, a straight-forward, low entertainment value format was preferred.

4) All learners preferred real-life settings, positive themes, documentary approaches, and some identification of instructional goals.

5) In many instances, the subjects learned more than they thought they had and some had difficulty accepting the fact that they could learn and enjoy the activity at the same time.

6) Younger adult learners were generally more responsive to subtle instructional formats than older adults, but there was enough variation in both groups for a substantial amount of overlap.

Implications

These results indicate that adult learners can accept and learn from instructional television formats that are quite different than the traditional classroom lectures or televised instruction. The holding power of entertaining

and interesting formats is particularly strong for content that is not particularly interesting to the learner. The variations in responses indicate that not all formats are equally appealing to all groups, though there are the beginnings of common themes which could serve as guidelines for further research and television program planning.